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MISKAWAYH ON SOCIAL JUSTICE, EDUCATION AND FRIENDSHIP

BADRUDDIN BHAT

Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) was one of the leading thinkers of the Buwayhid period. He was the first Muslim philosopher who based the science of historiography on rational grounds. In the present article we will elaborate his ideas on social justice, education and friendship etc. thereby, highlighting him as a social thinker.[1]

SOCIAL JUSTICE

We cannot imagine a government which does not have some kind of social justice. Opinions can differ as to the definition of it, but its importance for an ideal society cannot be disputed. Since the people are social by nature, they cannot live without active help and cooperation of one another. It is, therefore, necessary for one individual to serve another and receive from him something in return for it. The work of same particular nature is reciprocated. It is also possible that some individual's work may be better than that of others. Then there comes the "dīnār" for justice and equality. It creates balance, but remains silent. And the "Imām" or ruler, who organises a balanced transaction of goods and money, becomes a speaking agency of justice. When the silent one i.e., 'dīnār' cannot arrange matters well between the groups, the vocal agency comes in. Miskawayh has quoted Aristotle's saying that the greatest authority is God, ruler is the second authority (Nāmūs) and the 'dīnār' is the third one.[2]

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The 'dīnār' is the agency which administers justice in different things and enhances the price of some thing or minimises it. Thus, it creates a balance between the two and the business is equalised between, say, a cultivator and a carpenter. This is called the social justice.

Miskawayh further elaborates his conception of social justice by saying that a small piece of work may be equal to a major portion of work also. For instance, an engineer simply oversees things but actually his work is of great importance and his mere examination is equal to the work of all those people taken together, who work according to his design. Similarly, a C.N.C's mere glance and strategy is equivalent to, or more than the action of those troops who fight on the battle field and face heavy odds.[3]

Justice is not merely a part of virtue (Faḍīlah), but it is all virtue and the tyranny is opposite of it. Wherever there is injustice being committed in any sale, purchase, pledges, loans, rents, or it is found in the shape of theft, fornication and deception, it is the duty of the just ruler to eradicate all such foul play and follow the Sharī'ah to uphold justice. A follower of Sharī'ah, according to Miskawayh, performs things according to the spirit of justice, because, what he follows is Divine law. The Sharī'ah enjoins only good things (Khayrāt). A just man in effect exercises justice on his own self, while he administers it on other social beings.[4]

EDUCATION

Before we propound Miskawayh's ideas on education, it is necessary to express that he has been influenced by the philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and particularly Brison, from whom, he has borrowed at length. However, he has added his own views and ideas wherever he thought necessary to make it closer to the Islamic philosophy of education.

Miskawayh has started from the point that a child by instinct moves towards milk and sucks it from

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the breasts of its mother without any prior instruction. He sometime raises such voice as indicates its satisfaction or otherwise. This sense goes on developing in course of time. Then, it gets strong enough to move towards his tastes by means of the instruments made for it. After sometime, the instinct of anger emerges in it which urges it to remove all the irritants and take revenge if it can. If it is not in a position to do so personally, he ensures the help of his parents by weeping or crying. After this stage, he learns to differentiate between human activities which make him *ʿĀqil* in future.[5]

Miskawayh is of the opinion that to achieve the absolute good, sense of shame *(Ḥayā)* must first be awakened in a child. When it happens, the child is said to be sensitive to a wrong thing. And fears it and keeps himself aloof from it. When we see a child hanging its head, we should take it as the first sign of his nobility and proof enough that he has come to sense the difference between wrong and right. Miskawayh says that when the sense of shame is seen in a child, the proper time to impart education has come and at this stage, he should not be allowed to mix with other children having bad habits, because the impression formed at this stage will stay permanent and will influence his future.[6] At this very stage, he should be educated in nobility, which can be acquired only through acting according to religious principles and not by means of wealth. To inculcate the sense of nobility in him good people must be praised before him and if he himself does a good thing that also should be appreciated.[7]

Miskawayh is of the opinion that for the first time we should ignore a child's wrong activity. But, if he repeats, he should be reproached privately and the wrong of his act must be exaggerated. But, we whould not repeat the reproach, because, if we do, he will get accustomed to it and it will be easy for him to listen to our reproach and to continue with his bad habits.[8]

As for the dress, Miskawayh observes that the child may be reproached for its inclination towards

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decoration. The male child must be made to understand that the coloured and decorative dress is meant for women and stewards and that the best dress for noble people is of white and similar other colours.[9] He should be taught not to uncover the private parts of his body nor should he be hasty in walking. He should not wear his hair too long and should not put on female dress. He should not put on a ring unnecessarily. He should not boast before others or before his friends about a thing which is the property of his parents and should not be boastful about his dress but should behave properly and respectfully towards all those with whom he lives and should not mention nobility or power if he possesses some, when he is angry with some body.[10] Gold and silver should be discussed in a deprecating way before the child, because these things, according to Miskawayh, are more dangerous than snakes, scorpians and serpants and, therefore, harmful for humanity.[11]

Miskawayh has discussed the 'table etiquette,' the useful and harmful eatables and drinks. He says that a child should be made to understand that the eatables are meant for health and not for taste and that all the eatables have been created for us to build our body and keep our health. He argues that eatables are like medicines which cure hunger and its pangs. As the medicine is not meant for taste or to increase desires, similarly, the eatables should be meant only for the health and to avoid hunger and diseases. If the child takes more than needed, he must be chastized for that, so that he may learn to be content and check himself from many other inclinations.[12] He should be taught that when he sits for eating, he should not constantly gaze towards the different varieties. He should not get himself attracted by them. He should be taught to be content with what is enough for his stomach. The proper way of eating is, that haste should not be made in eating and taking morsels. Morsels should be moderate. He should also behave in such a way, that neither his, nor his neighbour's clothes are spoiled. The best etiquette is, that, he should help others and offer for them, even if, they may be having better than his own. To control his passions, he must learn to be content with ordinary and dry bread.

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Food should be taken in evening, because, if it is taken in day, one feels lethargic and wants to sleep and in this way human brain is rotten. Meat must be avoided generally, because, it is not useful for movement and alertness of body and also because, it causes stupidity. If possible, "ḥalwā" and fruits should be taken. Further, water should not be taken while eating food. Miskawayh is against "nabīdh" and other intoxicating drinks, because these are harmful for one's spirit and body. They provoke a man to hot anger, brutality and to bad activities. Any touch of intoxicants should be avoided and the company of scholars and men of letters should be preferred. Food should be taken only after proper fatigue and appetite.[13]

According to Miskawayh, it is unhealthy to sleep much at night, because of its abnormal effect on the functioning of brain and heart. But, so far as sleeping in the day is concerned, it should not be indulged in at all. A child should refrain from comfortable beds, so that his body may be hard and tough and should not use canvas in summer and woollen clothes in winter.[14] Miskawayh lays due emphasis on taking exercises. According to him, mounting on horse and other exercises are necessary to keep the diseases off the body. He should get relaxed himself by playing a good game, when he feels boredom in his studies.[15]

Miskawayh, writing on decorum and decency, advises that spitting should be avoided in the meeting places and seats of other's should not be occupied. The child should be taught not to keep one leg over the other or his forearm under his chin, because, this is the sign of his laziness and if it continues, a time may come, when he will not be able to lift his head without the help of his hand. He should not tell lies and swear rightly or wrongly. He must talk less but should answer questions. He should listen to the elders whenever they come to his residence. He should abstain from loose talk and improper habits. He should always talk with smiling face, making use of some humour also. He must respect and serve his parents and teachers.[16]

He should memorize poetry and other things

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which are valuable and informative. But we should be very cautious that he should not memorize immoral or obscene verses and stories relating to 'lovers' (ʿUshshaq). Such habits are very dangerous for all young chaps. He should attend the meetings of the men of letters and scholars so that, he may not listen to wicked or immoral talk which is found in the company of bad people.[17]

Concluding the discussion, Miskawayh writes that these manners are fruitful for young as well as for elders. But for young, these are most useful, because, they create the love of good qualities. They do not feel any difficulty in giving up bad habits. Later on, it becomes easier for them to follow the right course as explained by the Sharīʿah.[18]

After this thorough training in moral virtues and when his reason has become relatively mature the development of intellecutal virtue should be attended to. He should begin with mathematics and geometry, then take up logic. Logic prepares the intellect to distinguish between truth and falsehood and valid and fallacious reasoning. His attention should first be directed to those objects which can easily be observed i.e, the objects of the physical world. From physics, he should go on to astronomy and then to metaphysics and theology. Miskawayh suggests a number of books by Aristotle on logic, physics and other subjects which should be studied in order to become a philosopher. Books on ethics are recommended later to ensure the understanding of the nature of virtue and happiness and attainment of a virtuous life through the use of reason.[19]

If we analyse the views of Miskawayh on education, we can easily say, that he made a clear difference between education and instruction. Education helps in complete growth of an individual's personality, whereas, instruction merely trains an individual or a group to do some task efficiently. A man may be a great general, an efficient carpenter, or a first class pilot, a lawyer or a pathologist, a renowned doctor etc., but still remain a semi educated, ill mannered, immoral, unrighteous or unjust man.[20]

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Religion has a dominant and important place in Miskawayh's philosophy of education. Because, religion provides an all comprehensive norm of man and an all inclusive goal for education. The norm has a stability, because the values are regarded as absolutes derived from the absolute attributes of God. Religion provides a meaningful goal to education. According to religion this goal is revealed to man and thus it has an objective status. It is not concocted by man or just derived from experience. All experience is tied down to time and space, hence relative.[21]

Now, so far as the aims of Miskawayh's philosophy of education is concerned, it is the character formation of the youth. By character formation he meant the development of such qualities as truth, virtue and justice. Herbert, in the early nineteenth century, also pleaded for character formation as an aim of education.[22] The eminent modern educationist Raymount observes that the teacher's ultimate concern is to cultivate, not wealth of muscle nor fullness of knowledge, nor refinement of feeling but strength and purity of character.[23]

FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is a good quality which is developed amongst the human beings. Miskawayh, being a social thinker writes on friendship also.

Defining friendship, Miskawayh says that it is bond of love. It is not possible to find it among a great number of people at a time.[24] Miskawayh writes about the different kinds of friendship. He says that friendship between the youth takes place on account of taste. They befriend one another rapidly and discontinue their friendship also rapidly and somtimes it continues as long as their mutual taste exists. When the taste fades away, the friendship ends then and there. Similarly, the friendship between the old people is based on benefit and profit. When the profit is common between them thay are friends and the friendship continues as long as benifit continues and when their profitable relations terminate, their hopes also vanish and their friendship loses its ground. So far as the friendship between pious persons (Akhyār)

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is concerned, it is based on good spirit (Khayr). It evolves on good reasons. Naturally, the friendship having such bases lasts long and remains unchanged.[25]

Miskawayh, quoting Aristotle, says that man is always in need of a friend, in his good times as well as bad days. He is in need of a friend in bad times when he needs the help from his friend and at prosperous times he needs a friend to whom he will do good. Friendship is more important and greater than the golden treasuries of Korah and more precious than the heaps of wealth of all kings as Socrates has put it.[26]

When friendship is such a bliss and is more precious than material treasures, it becomes imperative for us to have a friend. But the question is how a friend can be selected and what should be the criterion for it. For this purpose, Miskawayh is of the opinion that we should enquire about the would- be friend as to how he behaves with his parents and relatives. If he is virtuous with them, then good must be expected from him. If he is otherwise, he should be left out. We should also see whether or not he has in his character to remain grateful. Then, we must see his inclination towards luxuries and lethargy, because, it is a bad habit and it is followed by the attraction towards tastes, which becomes the cause of retirement from the active life. If this is seen in a person, he is not fit to be chosen as a friend. We must see how he is serving others, and examine his love for gold and silver. It has been seen that many people who sermonize against these things, run like dogs after these very things at the slightest chance. So due care should be taken in the selection of a friend. If a man is anxious for power and exceeds the limits, he will never do justice to his friend. Similarly, if he is interested in music, songs and listening to indecent things or jokes, he will not be helpful for others.[27]

Merely selecting a friend is not enough. We have some obligations towards our friend which demand that we should look to his facilities in everything and should not take his right to our help lightly. In

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times of happiness, we should meet him with cheerfulmess and welcoming mood. And that, it should be clear from each and every activity or gesture of our body that we are happy at his arrival. This will enhance the spirit of friendship.[28]

Every man cannot hope to remain always prosperous. These things are like floating clouds in the sky. If our friend is in misfortune or trouble, we must explore the ways of helping him out. We should not wait for his request for help but we should rather peep into his heart and try to relieve him of his misfortune.[29]

Similarly, we should be cautious enough not to pick quarrels with friends, because, this becomes a cause of disunity.[30]

It is not necessary that we may be having only scholar friends. If our friend is not a learned person, we should never be miserly towards him in this respect and he should not feel that we are having some dominance or distinction over him.[31]

The most dangerous weapon against the true friendship is back-biting. That is to say, wicked people infiltrate in the garb of pious people and in the shape of sermonizers. These people provide us gilted and false information regarding our friends, so as to corrupt our brotherhood and friendship and create enmity between us. We must be very cautious about this danger, because, a back-biter first scratches the foundations of our friendship with his nails, then he uses the hatchets, with the result the foundations of solid friendship are demolished.[32]

Commenting on the views of Miskawayh on friendship, De Boer observes that "friendship, therefore, is not as Aristotle would have it, an expansion of self-love, but a limitation of it, or a kind of love of one's neighbour". And this, like virtue in general, can find a field of exercise only in society, or in citizenship, and not in the pious monk's renunciation of the world. The hermit, who thinks he is living temparately and righteously, is deceived as to the

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character of his actions: they may be religious, but moral they certainly are not; and therefore, the consideration of them does not belong to Ethics.[33]

On the whole the picture of friendship which Miskawayh has drawn is colder than that we have in Plato's Phaedrus, but it is more natural and human.[34]

Going through his *Tajārib al-Umam* we also see that he has always highlighted things which are fruitful for society and has criticized those things and policies which were not in the interest of moral health of society. While writing the Persian history, he praised kings like Manuchehr, Anushirawan etc., because their attitude was enviable and they treated their subjects very politely and with justice. He has quoted the sermons and the speeches of these kings to highlight the relationship between the kings and the subjects. He has put all these things before his readers. It is for them, particularly the politicians, to adopt these things in their administration, so that we can have a society without tyranny and cruelty.[35]

Similarly, he has quoted from Anūshīrawān. We see that the ideas expressed by Anūshīrawān are nice and fruitful for a just society of which Miskawayh was a propagator and defender. By quoting these things, he indirectly reveals to us his views.[36]

Similarly, when Rāḍī-bi-Allāh died in 329 A.H., Bajkam was the Amīr al-Umārā'. Miskawayh has recorded the sermons given by Sinan b. Thabit to Bajkam, which are very beneficial for both, the ruler and the ruled. Sinān advised Bajkam in these words:

> Ferocity creates in man the intoxication which is wrose than wine. And the man feels sorry after the influence of intoxication has gone. So, when you become furious and feel that anger has pervaded your senses, you delay the punishment for one night. This done, the force of anger will not be there. Because, it has been rightly said, that the best opinion is that, which is thought over at night and acted upon in the day. In case, in the morning you feel that the punishment is necessary, you should not cross the limits, and if you for-

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> give, that is the best thing for you to bring closer to God, provided the culprit and others would not take it as your weakness.[37]

Miskawayh criticizes Mu'izz al-Dawlah for his policy of fief giving, which had fatal results afterwards. Commenting on this wrong policy he writes:

> When administration is based on unsound principles, the fact, though in the beginning, it may be concealed, manifests itself in course of time. It is, as when a man diverges from the high road; a slight divergence goes unnoticed at first, but if it continues, he loses the sense of direction and the further he travels, the farther he gets astray.[38]

He criticized Bakhtiyār for spending his time in sports, amusements, and in the society of buffoons, singers and women.[39] Because, all these things have never been in the best interest of society and proved fatal for Bakhtiyār himself. As against this, he appreciated the policies of *'Aḍud al-Dawlah* for his reconstructing the ruined canals and streets of Baghdad and his administrative skill and aptitude, which no one among the Buwayhids exhibited.[40]

Lastly, we come to the conclusion that social emancipation, justice, equality and prudence in matters of the society were pervading all of Miskawayh's writing, on history, ethics or metaphysics. He does not ignore society anywhere and anyway, because, society is the main place wherefrom man can lead to the absolute *Sa'ādah*.

Miskawayh exercised a tremendous influence on subsequent writers. He was an indispensable source for al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 C.E.) in his *Mīzān al-'Amal* and a section of *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. His views on character, on child education and other ethical problems have been very much influenced by Miskawayh.[41]

Similarly, the *Akhlāq Nāṣirī* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274 C.E.) is a translation of the major portion of Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al Akhlāq*. Al-Ṭūsī has

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expressly acknowledged the debt of Miskawayh in his book.

The modern Egyptian administrator and educationist Rifāʿah al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1810 - 1873 C.E) was also influenced by Miskawayh. In Egypt Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* was held in great esteem. It was taught by Muḥammad ʿAbduh in his home after his graduation from Al-Azhar.[42]

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī quotes extensively from Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* in the first chapter of the *Manāhij*. The first passage from Miskawayh falls near the beginning of the first chapter of the *Manāhij*, inserted into a series of arguments for the goodness of wealth and the desirability of earning one's living. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī prefaces the passage with some comments on the nature of virtue as the means between the two vices, on Aristotalian definition, which is itself given in the *Tahdhīb*. The passage in question stresses the civic nature of man and denies the possibility of acquiring virtue in seclusion from society.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī wanted to establish the goodness of wealth. The passage he quotes from Miskawayh emphasizes that man is essentially gregarious and he attacks asceticism. This is a weapon for al-Ṭaḥṭāwī against the kind of Sufi piety that despised even moderate wealth.

The next passage from Miskawayh is a long one dealing with the methods of bringing up young boys. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī has been impressed by Miskawayh especially for some of his ideas regarding secular crafts, for it leads towards the betterment of the living conditions of people and individuals. These ideas developed by Miskawayh have helped al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, to assert the complementarity of modern science and industry with the Islamic revelation.[43]

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20. Al-Attas, S.N, in preface to his edited book, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (Jeddah, 1979) p. IX.
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24. *Tahdhīb*, p. 137. 25. *Ibid*, p. 138. 26. *Ibid*, p. 155.
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30. *Ibid*, p. 163. 31. *Ibid*, p. 164. 32. *Ibid*; p. 166.
33. De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, First reprint (Delhi 1983) pp. 130-131.
34. Ansari, op. cit., p. 115.
35. Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, reproduced in Facsimile by Leone Caetani, Gibb Mem. series (Leiden, 1909) vol. I, p. 21. Miskawayh quotes Manuchehr's speech in the following words:

> انّ الله عزّوجل أعطانا هذا الملک فله الحمد ونسئله الهام الرشد والصدق واليقين الاوانّ للملک على اهل مملكته حـــقاً ولاهل مملكته عليه حقاً فحق الملک على أهل مملكته ان يطيعوه وينا صحوه ويقاتلوا عدوه وحقهم على الملک أن يعطيهم ارزاقهم فى اوقاتها اذ لا معتمد لهم على غيرها وانه تجارتهم وحق الرعية على الملک ان ينظر لهم و يرفق بهم ولا يُعيّلهم مالايُطيقون . فان اصابتهم مُصيبة تنقص من ثمارهم لآفة او ضرر من السماء أو الأرض أن يسقط عنهم خراج ما نقص وان احتاجتهم مصيبة أو يعوضهم ما يقومهم على عمارتهم ثم يأخذ منهم على قدر ما لايحجف بهم فى سنة او سنتين .

36. Ibid, pp. 197-203. He cites Anūshirawān as follows:

> ولم يجعل الله لذوى قرابتنا وخدمنا وحاشيتنا منزلة عندنا دون الحـق والعدل فان من شأن قرابة الملک وحاشيته أن يستطيلوا بعزّة وقوة فإذا اهمل السلطان امراهم هلک من جاوره الا ان يكون فيهم متأدب بأدب ملكه محافظ على دينه شفيق على رعيته و اولئک قليل ـ فدعانا الذى اطلعنا عليه من ظلم اولائک الى أن لاتطلب البينه عليهم فيما ادعى قبلهم ولانمرد ظلم باحد ايضاً ممن كان عزيزا بنا منيعاً بمكانه ومنزلته عندنا فانّ الحق واسع للضعفاء والاقـويا والفقراء والأغنياء ..... وجدت الشيء الذى به اقام السموات والارض وارسى به الجبال و أجرى به الانهار و برأبه البريّة وذلک الحق والعدل فلنزمته ورأيت ثمره الحق والعدل ، عمارة البلدان التى بها معاش الناس و الـدواب والطـير وســكان الارض

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38. *Ibid*, vol 6, pp. 96-97, tr. p. 100.
39. *Ibid*, p. 235, tr. p. 249.
40. *Ibid*, pp. 404-8, tr. pp. 443-48.
41. Ansari, *op. cit*, p. 146. The amount of Miskawayh's influence on Ghazālī can easily be guaged by comparing the relevant portions of his *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* and *Iḥyā ʿUlūm al-Dīn* of Ghazālī. Below we cite some extracts from both the works.

تهذيب الاخلاق	احياء علوم الدين
ويحذر النظر فى الاشعار السخيفة وما فيها من ذكر العشق وأهله وما يوهمه اصحابها انه ضرب من الظرف ورقة الطبع فان هذا الباب مفسدة للاحداث جدا .	ويحفظ من الاشعار التى فيها ذكر العشق واهله ويحفظ من مخالطه الادباء الذين يزعمون ان ذلك من الظرف ورقة الطبع فان ذلك يغرس فى قلوب الصبيان بذر الفساد .
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ويعلم ان أولى الناس بالملابس الملونة والمنقوشة النساء التى بتزين للرجال وان الأحسن بأهل النبل والشرف من اللباس البياض .	وان يحب اليه من الثياب البيض دون الملون والابريسم ويقرر عنده ان ذلك شان النساء .
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ثم يمدح بكل ما يظهر منه من خلق جميل و فعل حسن يكرم عليه فان خالف فى بعض الاوقات ما ذكرته بالأولى ان يونج عليه بل يتغافل عنه لاسيما ان ستره الصبى واجتهد فى ان يخفى مافعله عن الناس فان عاد فليونج عليه سرا وليعظم عنده ما اتاه و يحذر من معاودته .	ثم مهما ظهر من الصبى خلق جميل فينبغى ان يكرم عليه فان خالف ذلك فى بعض الاحوال فينبغى ان يتغافل عنه ـ ولاسيما اذا ستره الصبى واجتهد فى اخفائه . فعند ذلك ان عاد ثانيا فينبغى ان يعاتب سرا ويعظم الامر فيه ويقال له اياك ان تعود .
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وينبغى أن يعودان لايبصق فى مجالسه ولا يمتخط ولا يتثأب بحضرة غيره ـ ولا يضع رجلاً على رجل ولايضرب تحت ذقنه بساعده ولايعمد رأسه بيديه فان ذلك دليل الكسل .	وينبغى أن يعودان لايبصق فى مجلسه ولا يمتخط ولايتثاءب بحضرة غيره ـ ولايضع رجلا على رجل ولايضع كفه تحت ذقنه ولا يعمد رأسه بساعده فان ذلك دليل الكسل .
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[pp. 57-62.]	[Vol. 3 (Cairo, 1246 A.H) pp. 61-65.]

42. Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh*, (Cairo, 1931) p. 135.
43. Cole, J.R., "Rifaʿāh al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and the Revival of Practical Philosophy", *Muslim World* (New York, January 1980) pp. 37-42.

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